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**ALFRED**  
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AZINE

Cardula flies—sorry, spies—again . . .

# CARDULA AND THE KLEPTOMANIAC

by  
Jack  
Ritchie



It was a beautiful evening—full moon, cloudless sky, and no headwinds. I would have preferred to fly, but my client, Diana Weatherly, insisted upon driving me in her car.

“What was the size of the stone?” I asked.

“About fifteen carats.”

“Valuable, of course?”

My dark-haired, violet-eyed client smiled. “Mr. Cardula, I don’t be-

CARDULA AND THE KLEPTOMANIAC

lieve that it could be replaced for under fifty dollars."

I pondered the point. "A fifteen-carat diamond pendant worth only fifty dollars?"

She explained. "The stone wasn't a genuine diamond. It was glass, or paste, or plastic, or whatever they make those things out of these days."

"Hm," I said intelligently. "Then the stolen stone was only a *copy* of the original pendant?"

"It wasn't a copy of anything. It was an original in itself."

I nodded. "Now let me reprise. Last night someone crept into your bedroom while you were asleep and stole this pendant?"

"Yes. I was waiting there in the semi-darkness to see who would steal it, but somehow I simply conked off to sleep instead."

"So this was all in the nature of a trap? You deliberately placed the pendant in an obvious spot in your bedroom and then pretended to go to sleep? Unfortunately, your pretense turned into reality and you dozed off while the thief went about his work?"

She confirmed. "I just can't understand falling asleep like that. I mean, one would have thought that the excitement of the wait would have kept me awake and alert, but I believe I fell asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow. As a matter of fact, I slept until almost noon today and was still sleepy when I got up."

I rubbed my lean jaw. "It is my suspicion that you might have been drugged. Did you have a nightcap or something of that nature before you retired?"

"Well, it's a big weekend party and everybody drinks. I suppose anybody could have slipped something into one of my martinis."

"And this morning, when you discovered that your pendant was missing, you immediately raised the alarm?"

"Certainly not. We simply don't do things like that in my circle. Not for a piece of fake jewelry. The only people who know that the pendant is missing are me, the thief, and you."

"Is any one of your guests in financial trouble?"

"Not as far as I know. We're all rather well off."

"But one can never tell, can one? What I am getting at is that perhaps one of your guests, badly in need of money, hoped to realize a fortune by stealing and selling a stone which he assumed was worth thousands."

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She shook her head. "Oh, no. That won't do as a motive here at all. You see, everybody—or at least the four specific persons with whom we are concerned—knew that the stone wasn't genuine because I told them so. The thief *never* would have stolen the pendant if he thought it was at all valuable."

I frowned at the atrocious green cufflinks I was wearing while I waited for clarification.

"The only respect in which I did lie," she said, "was to tell them that I regarded the pendant as a sort of good luck charm and was quite fond of it."

I drew my eyes away from the cufflinks. "Each of your guests—or at least a particular four—knew that the pendant was of no real monetary value and yet one of these four could not resist stealing it during the night? And further, you *expected* that the attempt would be made?"

She smiled sweetly. "I was not one hundred percent positive, but I did think there was a strong possibility."

My client had come to my office at a few minutes after nine this evening with the green cufflinks.

Now she said, "You see, one of those four I mentioned is a kleptomaniac. Or at least I think that he—or she—could be classified as such." She sighed. "It all started years and years ago. We grew up in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools, moved in the same social circles. We all live on Jefferson Point. You've heard of it, of course?"

Even I, a relative stranger to the area, had. Jefferson Point was an enclave of sorts, a colony of the wealthy beyond the suburbs of those who were simply well-to-do.

Diana took the freeway turnoff. "As I said, it began years and years ago. At parties and things like that. Quite often something would turn up missing—some little thing that was inexpensive, but personal. A comb, or a lipstick, a Mickey Mouse watch."

"These things were stolen just from you?"

"Oh, no. The thief played no favorites. He took from anybody."

"No one ever took the matter to the police?"

"Of course not. He—or she—never stole anything of real value. And actually, most of the time the victim assumed that he or she had simply misplaced or lost the article and that it would turn up after a while, but it never did." She was thoughtful. "The thief was very careful and

clever. Besides me, I don't think that there are more than two or three people in our circle who even suspect that there might be a kleptomaniac among us."

"It strikes me that stealing a pendant from your dresser during the night is not being very clever. Surely you would realize immediately that the object had been stolen, not misplaced."

"Yes, but the thief would count on me to suspect one of the servants. It is unthought of for any hostess on Jefferson Point to believe one of her guests capable of stealing a trinket."

"When did you first suspect that there was a kleptomaniac on Jefferson Point?"

"It was just after my blue rat-tail comb disappeared at the Emerson party two years ago. I was positive that I hadn't lost or misplaced it. Then I began to think about all of the other things that I and others had 'lost' during all those years, and it suddenly occurred to me that they might not have been lost at all."

"And so you began looking for the thief?"

"Yes. At first, of course, I had to deal with dozens and dozens of suspects. But then, by cross-checking who was at whose party when something disappeared, I eventually narrowed down my list to four people."

"Did you mention to anyone that you were looking for the thief?"

"Of course not. Word would eventually have gotten to him, and he might have stopped stealing altogether, and I was dreadfully curious about who he might be."

"But now you seem to have decided to give up detecting for yourself and you have hired me, a professional."

"Yes, Mr. Cardula. Last night I failed and I think that baiting another trap tonight and expecting results would be just too optimistic. I doubt very much if the thief would steal from me on consecutive nights. And besides, my four suspects all leave tomorrow morning for their various jobs and things and there's no telling when I might get them all under the same roof again. Albert's in the Army and his leave is ending, Imogene has those boutiques she's opened in Chicago to keep her busy, Herbert has his medical practice, and Agnes spends most of her time following the sun." She took her eyes off the road for a moment to look at me. "That's where you and the cufflinks come in."

In my office she had presented me with the cufflinks. They were the

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most garish and obviously inexpensive set I had ever worn—or seen, for that matter. But they were, I will admit, attention getting.

“Do you think that your kleptomaniac will steal from a total stranger?”

“I don’t see why not. He seems to have been completely indiscriminate in his victims.”

I watched her. “Last night, if you had not fallen asleep and you had caught your kleptomaniac in the act, what would you have done?”

Her eyes flickered for a moment. “Why absolutely nothing. I would just have let him—or her—take the pendant while I pretended to be asleep. It is just to satisfy my curiosity that I want to find out who he is.”

“And what am I expected to do when I see who the culprit is? Shall I pounce upon him?”

“Nothing of the sort,” she said firmly. “Let him steal the damn cufflinks. I just want you to identify him to me immediately.”

We drove along winding tree-lined blacktop until Diana finally turned into one of the estate lanes. She followed it and stopped before a large and well-lighted mansion. I gazed dubiously at the dozen or so cars parked in the driveway. “Just how many weekend guests do you have?”

“Twenty-three. However, we are concerned with only four of them. I wanted the thief to feel safe, secure, and daring in a herd, so to speak.”

We got out of the car. “This is my parents’ home,” she said. “But they’re in Europe at the moment and this is my bash. I doubt very much if anybody’s missed me.”

She stopped for a moment and then said, “Ah, what luck. Here are two of our suspects now. Albert and Imogene.”

She led me to the side terrace and introduced me as a friend from Europe.

Albert Spurrier wore an immaculate Army uniform with a major’s gold oak leaves. There were rows of ribbons and awards running across the left side of his jacket. He was perhaps six feet tall and could have been described as ruddy, one of my favorite colors.

“Albert used to be a Boy Scout,” Diana said. “He earned every single award and badge they had to offer.”

Albert nodded happily. "Only been done once before, you know. And I still am a scout, Diana. The leader of Troop 196 at the post."

"As you can see," Diana said, "Albert is quite a brave man. He has any number of combat awards."

Albert sighed. "That's the one part of the Army I dislike."

Diana smiled. "Albert is basically a pacifist."

He agreed. "Almost, Diana. I hate war, but I was drafted, faced up to my duty to my country, and went off as a private. Then I discovered that I liked the Army. Not war, mind you, but the regular routine of peacetime Army life that drives most other men out of their minds. So I managed to get an appointment to West Point and here I am today." He shook his head sadly. "War itself is so disorderly. Smashing things. It revolts the architectural and human ecologist in me. But the peacetime Army is quite another thing. To be frank about it, I love accumulating awards and badges and ribbons, though not combat stars. Or wounds, for that matter." He indicated a number of items on his chest. "I'm a qualified parachutist, shoot expertly with any weapon, and have just completed a ranger course. In September I'm off to helicopter school. They give the neatest badges. Real collector's items."

Imogene McCarthy had been listening patiently. She had auburn hair and was rather tall. She regarded me with some interest. "You have the most charming accent."

I bristled slightly. "Madam, I am positive that I do *not* have an accent."

"Well, you *look* as though you have an accent."

"Imogene collects elephants," Diana said. "Not the real live ones, of course. Those little china and plastic and glass ones."

"China only, dear," Imogene corrected. "That puts a sensible boundary on the whole damn project."

"Imogene has a whole room at home devoted to shelves of china elephants," Albert said.

Imogene smiled patiently. "I started collecting when I was twelve. After two years, I'd completely lost interest in them, but by then it was too late. I already had two hundred elephants and had established a reputation. People still keep sending me elephants whenever they travel. From Bangladesh, Madagascar, Monaco. I personally haven't collected any of the creatures since my fourteenth birthday—in fact,

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I haven't been in that room for ten years. But my parents tell me I am now the proud owner of almost a thousand china elephants and the end is still not in sight."

Diana Weatherly now directed our attention to the cufflinks I was wearing. "Why, Mr. Cardula, I hadn't noticed those cufflinks before. How very extraordinary and rococo. I suppose they are ancient and priceless heirlooms?"

I regarded the horrible things with heroic fondness. "Why, no. As a matter of fact they are just green glass. However, I do treasure them for other reasons. They were given to me by an old gypsy woman with the exhortation that if I wore them, they would ward off evil. She added that once a month would be quite sufficient."

Since I do not drink—certainly not alcohol—and thus could not be drugged, I thought I would add something of my own to our trap. I politely covered a yawn. "I have just finished a tedious bit of traveling. I'll probably sleep like a log tonight. And once I get to sleep, nothing short of a cannon can wake me."

Diana began the process of moving me away. "I've got to introduce Mr. Cardula to a few other people. I hope the two of you are finding something to talk about?"

Albert nodded. "Actually, Imogene and I haven't seen each other since Roger's funeral."

Diana took my arm and we moved away. "Imogene was my dearest friend in school. But I must add that when I was about thirteen, I 'lost' a little bracelet that had four tiny little elephants dangling from it."

We entered the house and she indicated a tall dark man with a Mephistophelian beard at the other end of the room. "Dr. Herbert P. Jonas."

"And what does he collect?" I asked.

"Heartbeats," Diana said.

We edged through the guests until we reached the doctor.

"I was just telling Mr. Cardula about your record collection, Herb," Diana said and turned back to me. "Herb collects heartbeats. On tape, wire, records, and so forth. He has healthy heartbeats, morbid heartbeats, and sad heartbeats, happy heartbeats. You name a heart disease and he'll have a record of that one pounding away—ordinary hearts, extraordinary hearts, hearts of the famous. He has the heartbeat of Calvin Coolidge."

Dr. Jonas shrugged. "Actually, the sound quality is terrible. But the record has been certified as authentic." He studied me. "I am always on the lookout for unusual heartbeats. You wouldn't by any chance be a collector's item?"

"No," I said firmly. "My heart is quite normal. I'll stake my life on that." I winced slightly.

Diana discovered my cufflinks and bubbled, "I've been wanting to comment on what striking cufflinks you have, Mr. Cardula. A family heirloom, perhaps? Quite valuable, I suppose?"

I went through my routine for the benefit of Dr. Jonas, our third suspect.

Diana's eyes flitted about the room and finally settled upon another individual. "There's Agnes. I've simply got to have you meet her."

We left Dr. Jonas and threaded our way toward Agnes.

"Agnes has just gotten rid of her fourth husband. Three of the collection were tennis pros. I think she's gone back to her maiden name, which is Williams."

Agnes Williams was a striking blonde with no disappointing proportions and one had the feeling that she was tanned from crown to toe, without interruptions. She appeared to be in deep conversation with a tall young man, also thoroughly tanned, whose first name proved to be Cedric.

Diana introduced us and after we successfully passed through our cufflink routine she said, "How is your tennis, Agnes?"

Agnes laughed lightly. "I've given it up. It just isn't my game." She shook her head sadly. "You know, Diana, times have changed so dreadfully that two of my ex-husbands are collecting alimony from *me*. They convinced the judge that they had the right to be maintained in the style of life to which I had accustomed them."

A small happy smile crept into Cedric's face.

Diana regarded Cedric. "Cedric doesn't play tennis?"

"Absolutely not," Agnes said. "He has no use for the game. He's the golf pro over at the Nagawanah Country Club."

Agnes turned her critical attention to me. "You should get out in the sun more, Mr. Cardula. Get yourself a healthy tan."

"No," I said. "I am allergic."

She nodded sympathetically. "Why not try a sun lamp instead?"

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beam of a sun lamp carries exactly the same properties as that of the sun itself. Suppose I turned on the switch and . . .” I sighed. “I simply cannot afford to experiment. One mistake and it is my last.”

When Diana and I were alone again, she said, “Well, there’s your cast of suspects. I don’t suppose you know which one of them is our kleptomaniac yet?”

“I rather suspect that I do. Though, of course, I may be mistaken.”

Her eyes clouded in thought. “Was it something one of them said?”

“No, it was something you said. Tell me, at what time yesterday evening did you begin showing off the pendant and conveying your information concerning it?”

“At around ten. I wanted to make sure that all four of my suspects were coming before I set my trap and Imogene didn’t get here until nearly that time.”

There was a short silence and then she said, “Well, which one of them is the kleptomaniac?”

I smiled sparingly. “I cannot jeopardize the name of someone who may in fact prove to be innocent. We will set our little trap tonight and see if I am correct.” I paused a moment. “Who was Roger?”

Her face seemed to freeze for a moment. “He was my brother.”

“And he died?”

“Yes.”

“An accident?”

“No.” And it was obvious that she was not prepared to talk further on the subject. “Your room is on the second floor on the right at the end of the corridor.”

I nodded. “And your suite?”

“Why do you need to know that?”

“Madam,” I said, “when I discover who our kleptomaniac is, I intend to tell you immediately. I am not remaining for breakfast.”

“My door is farther down the corridor on the right-hand side next to the bust of Edgar Allan Poe,” Diana said.

She left me to circulate among her guests and I edged my way back to Imogene McCarthy, the collector of elephants. When we were within speaking distance, I said, “Several people here have made reference to Roger’s funeral. Roger was Diana’s brother, wasn’t he?”

Imogene nodded. “Yes. He was about a year older than she. They

CARDULA AND THE KLEPTOMANIAC

were inseparable. Roger was great fun, though he did tend to drink a little too much."

"It was a pity how he died," I said cleverly.

She agreed. "Yes."

There was a silence. I cleared my throat. "I've heard conflicting stories."

She seemed surprised. "What's to conflict?"

There was a longer silence while she measured me. Then she smiled. "You haven't heard any conflicting stories at all, have you? As a matter of fact, you really don't know anything at all about Roger's death. You're just nosy and want to find out."

I found myself blushing, which is quite a strain.

She waved a hand. "Nosiness is nothing to be ashamed of. How else can we learn anything if we're not nosy? Roger was murdered. Somebody hit him over the head with one of my iron elephants."

Dutifully I said, "Iron elephants?"

"Yes. Just about two years ago, at my place. It's down the road about a mile." She took a drink from a passing servant's tray. "We had a weekend something like this one, with lots of guests."

She sipped the drink. "Well, came morning, Roger was found dead in his pajamas on the floor of his bedroom. He'd been struck over the head, as I say, with one of my iron elephants."

"But I thought you collected only china . . ."

"I try to. But some people just can't get that distinction through their heads, so they send me other kinds too. Those damn plastic ones, or lead, or aluminum, or iron, or whatever. Well, I can't just toss them away. People would eventually learn about it and their feelings would be hurt. So Mother stores most of my non-china elephants in boxes, but she also distributes a few around the house as knickknacks. And there was an iron elephant on Roger's dresser—"

"But who killed him?"

"Nobody knows to this day. The police came and questioned everyone and took fingerprints. It was exciting, but they couldn't pin it on anyone. So they settled for the old intruder theory, because the French windows to the balcony were open."

She finished her drink. "You know the way it goes. The thief breaks into Roger's room. Roger wakes. The burglar panics and smashes Roger over the head with the nearest thing available."

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"Was anything missing?"

"Roger's wallet was still on the dresser and it had about two hundred dollars in it, according to the police. They think that Roger woke before the burglar got to the wallet. And after killing Roger the intruder had nothing but escape on his mind."

"Are you satisfied with that theory?"

"Personally, I think that one of the guests did it, but I haven't the faintest suspicion who."

"Roger's sister was one of your guests?"

"Yes, poor dear. Of course it quite devastated her."

I casually exhibited my cufflinks again and stifled another yawn. "I hope it isn't impolite to leave the party, but I simply must go to my room and get some sleep. I'm dead tired. Once my head hits the pillow I sleep like a log."

"I know," Imogene said.

I made my way to the second floor and stopped at the door of Diana's suite. I tried the doorknob and the door opened. I stepped inside. In the moonlight, I studied the room. There was the bed in which Diana must have been lying last night, and the dresser on which she had put the bait, her pendant.

She had intended to feign sleep and see who came to steal the pendant. She was going to do nothing to thwart or expose the thief. She just wanted to satisfy her curiosity.

Frankly, I didn't believe a word of it.

I moved to the night stand on the right side of the bed and pulled open the top drawer.

Ah, yes.

I picked up and examined the revolver. It was a .48 Magnum, a weapon whose slug is touted as capable of destroying the engine block of an automobile.

I put the gun back into the drawer and left the room. I found my own bedroom and entered.

Should I read for a while? It could be hours before the guests settled in their rooms for the night. Probably my suspect would wait until two or three in the morning—an hour when he felt that everyone would be asleep—before he set about the task of stealing my cufflinks. On the other hand, he might be bolder and simply steal away from the party

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now and risk entering my bedroom. After all, I had quite thoroughly established that once I got to sleep it was impossible to wake me.

I really couldn't take any chances. I unsnapped my cufflinks and put them on the dresser. Then I took off my shoes and lay down on the bed, pulling the covers up to my chin.

Frankly, I should have read. It was hours before I heard the last guests finding their rooms and settling down for the night.

I continued to wait, frequently consulting my digital watch, and began to have doubts that my bait was to be taken.

Three A.M. passed. I most certainly would have to leave before four if I wanted to arrive home before sunrise.

My hearing is abnormally acute and so I caught the faint click of a door being opened somewhere down the hall. I waited, and soon distinguished the brush of shoes or slippers on the hall runner. The sounds came closer, then stopped just outside my door.

The moonlight provided sufficient light so that I could see the doorknob slowly turn. I closed my eyes to slits, and watched the door being pushed silently open. A dark figure appeared in the doorway and stood obviously listening.

I decided to breathe rather heavily. That would have to be sufficient. I refused to stoop to the indignity of a snore.

After a few more moments, my intruder appeared to be satisfied. The figure moved quickly to the dresser, scooped up the cufflinks, and darted out of the room. It was all over within a matter of seconds, during which time, however, I was clearly able to establish the identity of the kleptomaniac.

When the intruder was gone, I waited a few minutes and then put on my shoes. I went out to the small balcony outside my windows and circled the house.

Only two windows on the second floor of the wing were lighted. In one of the rooms I saw the kleptomaniac, eyes gleaming, examining the cufflinks.

And in the other, Diana sat in her bed reading a book and glancing impatiently at her watch, obviously waiting for news concerning our kleptomaniac.

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locked them. She stared past me and frowned. "How did you get here? This balcony doesn't connect to yours."

"Never mind that," I said. "Suffice it to say that I am here."

She brightened immediately. "The trap worked? You know who the kleptomaniac is?"

I rubbed my jaw—happily noting the absence of the cufflinks. "Madam, why do you keep that revolver in your night stand?"

Her eyes went to the object of furniture in question. "How did you . . ." Then she shrugged. "For protection, of course."

"You purchased the weapon yourself?"

She shrugged again. "Yes."

I smiled. "No, Madam, it is extremely doubtful that you bought that revolver yourself for yourself. Not a .48 Magnum. Women tend toward the traditional .22. Or possibly, in our liberated age, the bold .32. But a .48 Magnum? Never. Even if you went to a gun store fully primed to buy a .48 Magnum, any clerk worth his salt would succeed in directing you to a smaller caliber."

"So I didn't buy it myself," she said. "It used to belong to Roger. What difference does it make?"

"Madam, I was merely pursuing the point that if one lies about one thing one is likely to lie about others. Therefore, I submit that last night when you baited your trap it was not with the innocent intention of merely satisfying your curiosity as to the identity of the kleptomaniac. When the thief picked up that pendant, you premeditatively intended to blast his engine block . . ." I regrouped. "You intended to blast the vitals from his body."

"Ridiculous," she said, avoiding my eyes. "Now who is the klepto?"

I continued. "And why would you want to destroy a relatively harmless kleptomaniac?" I permitted myself another small smile. "Because he is not a relatively harmless kleptomaniac. This individual has done something to you—or yours—which you feel merits his murder."

I regarded her penetratingly. "And this brings to mind the death of your brother. It is my deduction that you suspect that the killer of your brother is also the neighborhood kleptomaniac. There was something about Roger's death that convinced you."

She was silent for thirty seconds and then decided to talk. "The ring. Roger's missing ring. He wore two rings. One of them was obviously worth thousands of dollars. The thief did not take it. The other was a

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class ring, just a silver ring with Roger's initials and the date his class graduated, 1971. I don't believe it was worth more than thirty dollars. But the thief took that." Her eyes met mine fiercely. "Don't you see? That night two years ago Roger had quite a bit to drink and the kleptomaniac counted upon Roger being in a deep sleep. But as he was removing the ring from Roger's finger, Roger woke up and recognized him. Or her. The kleptomaniac killed him rather than being unveiled to the world."

"Why didn't you tell the police about the missing ring?"

"Because at the time I didn't realize it was gone. I mean, just seeing his body like that blotted out everything else. It wasn't until weeks after his funeral that I realized the ring had been missing."

"But you still didn't go to the police with the information?"

"Frankly, by that time I had lost all confidence in the police. It seemed to me that the only way the killer would ever be uncovered was to find the kleptomaniac. But if they bungled that job too, they might frighten him into never stealing again and my last hope of catching him would disappear. No. I wanted him to think that he had gotten away with murder and keep stealing again and again until I finally tracked him down."

"Diana," I said, "has it ever occurred to you that the kleptomaniac and the murderer might not be one and the same person?"

"But the missing ring . . ."

I held up a hand. "The kleptomaniac might have stolen the ring while Roger was still alive and sleeping. And later, someone else—another guest or possibly even this suspected intruder—could have entered the room and killed Roger for another reason. Or possibly the killing was done first, and when the kleptomaniac entered the room on his own mission he was not deterred by the fact that Roger was dead."

She shook her head. "Something like that would be just too much of a coincidence. I mean murder and kleptomania to the same man the same night."

I offered another possibility. "Suppose that after murdering Roger, the killer decided to put the blame on the kleptomaniac by also stealing Roger's ring. Unfortunately for him, nobody noticed that the ring was missing."

Diana dissented again. "But if the killer went to the trouble of stealing the ring and nobody noticed it was missing, wouldn't he somehow

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call attention to the fact himself? Wouldn't he casually clear his throat and say something like 'By Jove, isn't Roger's class ring missing?' But no one did." She folded her arms. "All right, now who is our kleptomaniac killer?"

I hesitated. "You still have no intention of taking the matter to the police?"

"With no tangible evidence that the kleptomaniac and the killer are the same? No, the only solution—the only justice—is for me to kill the killer myself."

"Diana, do you realize that if you do kill Roger's murderer you will undoubtedly go to prison for a long, long time?"

She squared her shoulders. "I don't care. Who is the kleptomaniac?"

I shook my head. "I haven't the slightest intention of telling you. Firstly, because I do not want to see you go to prison, and secondly because the police might construe that I am an accessory to murder by providing the name of the victim."

She became demanding. "I'll give you ten thousand dollars for his name."

"No."

"Twenty thousand."

"No."

Eventually she reached the "I'll give you a blank check" stage, but I remained adamant.

She took a deep breath. "Very well. But you aren't the only private detective in the world. I'll hire another—as many as I need—until I find out who killed Roger."

I glanced at my watch. It was that time again. "I'm afraid I must bid you an immediate goodnight."

I left her in her room and walked down the corridor until I found the free night air and headed for home.

The next evening, when I rose, I shaved, showered, and proceeded to my office. I consulted the telephone book for the home address of my killer/kleptomaniac and wrote it in my notebook.

I waited until ten o'clock and then took off for Jefferson Point. Since I was not familiar with the region or its winding roads, I was forced to descend a number of times to consult directional signs and numbers before I finally found the house for which I was searching.

I circumnavigated the building until I found lights in a second-floor bedroom. Inside, my kleptomaniac was in the process of unlocking a large suitcase on the bed. The lid sprang open.

I blinked.

The suitcase was filled to overflowing with bracelets, rings, combs, necklaces, baubles, and gewgaws of every sort. Evidently I had arrived at that hour of the evening when he gloated over the spoils.

I turned the knob of the French window and stepped softly into the room. I moved toward the killer, who remained completely unaware of my presence.

What motivated the kleptomania I could not guess—I am not a psychiatrist—but I did know that the future portended that Diana would eventually track down her brother's killer and in turn become a murderess and be sent to prison.

Hardly a proper ending for this case.

Yet Diana was quite right. Justice must be done, though it must be done with more expertise and anonymity.

I reached forward and tapped Dr. Herbert P. Jonas on the shoulder. He leaped into the air and when his feet touched the rug again, he was facing me, his eyes wide and wild.

I indicated the collection and clucked my tongue. "So *you* are the Jefferson Point kleptomaniac."

He stared at me. "Who the devil are you and how did you get in here?" And then he recognized me.

I nodded. "I am Cardula. Licensed and bonded private detective." I indicated the array again. "It is my duty to expose you to the world."

He ran his tongue over his lips. "Now just one moment, Mr. Cardula. Couldn't we come to some . . ."

I stayed his words. "No, Dr. Jonas. I am impossible to bribe into silence." I went to his bedside phone and picked it up. This put my back to him, though I did still have a fair view of him through the dresser mirror. I began dialing at random.

What would he do now? I wondered. I stopped dialing and pretended to be waiting for the connection to be made. Jonas's eyes darted madly about the room and then decided upon a heavy glass ashtray. He picked it up and advanced behind me, arms upraised.

Ah, I thought with some satisfaction, I had not said that I would expose him as a murderer. Merely a kleptomaniac. But he considered

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that quite a sufficient reason to kill me—just as, it was now obvious, he had killed Roger Weatherly.

I turned quickly, dropped the phone, and swiftly and efficiently snapped his neck.

A certain basic logic had led me to suspect him from the beginning. On the night her pendant had been stolen Diana had obviously been drugged. After all, one simply does not drop off to innocent sleep when one is waiting to kill someone.

And does your average soldier, or elephant-, or husband-collector carry about on his person for instant use knockout drops or sleeping powders? If lengthy premeditation to steal were involved, perhaps yes. However, none of the suspects even knew of the existence of Diana's pendant until ten o'clock that night.

And so that left Dr. Jonas, who, like all physicians, was never far from his little black bag and its contents. Probably he had kept it in his car. And once determined to steal the pendant, he had simply gone outside, fetched the amount of sleeping potion he needed, and slipped it into one of Diana's drinks.

I poured the contents of the suitcase out upon the bed. Yes, there were my cufflinks, hideously obvious even in that melange. I rummaged through the collection until I found a silver ring bearing the initials R.W. and the date 1971. I sighed and put it back.

I carried the body of the now defunct Dr. Jonas out to the balcony and dropped it to the driveway below.

When daylight came, he would be discovered and the police would be called. They would investigate and come upon the bed strewn with its trinkets, the bizarreness of which would certainly get Jonas's demise a prominent place in the newspapers. The identification of various objects long thought lost by the residents of Jefferson Point would follow and the neighborhood kleptomaniac would finally be unmasked.

And the police? They would eventually assume that Dr. Jonas had gone out onto the balcony for a breath of fresh air or to admire the moonlight and that somehow he had tripped over the low railing and snapped his neck on the driveway below.

I stood on the balcony, looking down at the body.

What blood type was he, I wondered? A pos? A neg? B pos? The hell with it. I wouldn't touch him again with a ten-foot pole.

I flew back to my office.

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